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By G. B. HARRISON, M.A.

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SHAKESPEARE

By G. B. HARRISON, M.A.

Author of *Shakespeare's Fellows*, etc.; Editor of *The Bodley Head Quartos*; *The New Reader's Shakespeare*, etc.

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NOTE

THE space allotted to the volumes in this series is necessarily so short that I have thought it best to confine myself to the broad issues of the greater plays and to avoid altogether all bibliographical problems. No one can write on Shakespeare's plays without large borrowings, conscious or unconscious, from the great English critics, living and dead; my debts are, in some measure, acknowledged in the short bibliography on page 78.

G. B. H.

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SHAKESPEARE

His Life

Nothing is harder than to forecast the literary judgments of posterity. Poetic reputations blaze up and dwindle, and the fire which heartened one generation will be but cold ashes to the next; yet for three centuries Shakespeare's fame has glowed so steadily that he has come to be looked on as the supreme expression of the genius of the English race. In Dr. Johnson's words, "The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare."

He had the good fortune to be born in a great age, but this is no explanation of his lasting reputation; few of the many writers, his equals in popularity during his lifetime, are now known to any but professed students. Nor is it in the nature of man to prefer the old to the new, and, if Shakespeare is still the most read of English writers, it is because he has in abundance the greatest gift of the artist, the power to separate the elements of the human character from the ore of environment and circumstance.

As with other worships, Shakespeare's followers have gathered themselves into sects, of which the most important are scholars, critics, and actors. All agree to acknowledge the supreme genius, but each is inclined at times to resent the intrusions of the others.

The scholar maintains that since Shakespeare has been dead for more than three hundred years, the meaning of much that he wrote can only be understood by those who are prepared to study his times. With greater vehemence the actor declares that, as Shakespeare was

himself an actor and intended his plays to be acted on a stage and not to be dissected in the study, only those who have been initiated into the Mystery of Playing can venture to criticise him. The critic, on the other hand, relying on his knowledge of men and books, retorts that neither scholars nor actors can know the whole truth, for the very nature of their professions debars them from that catholicity of mind which is so essential in the appreciation of genius. Each, in his own way, is right, and none can do without the other; yet Shakespeare is not the possession of any sect, and a man need be neither actor, scholar, nor critic to read him simply for pleasure.

A play seen is a different experience from a play read. Most dramas written for the stage make pale reading; with Shakespeare's the one experience intensifies the other. There is no need to argue whether *Hamlet* is a play or a poem or a text; it is all three, and greater than any.

Much is known of the external circumstances of Shakespeare's life, and though few of his biographers can refrain from the "imaginary peep" when records are wanting, the general outline is clear enough. For seven years after 1585 no trace of him can be found, but from 1592 to his death in 1616 the records of every kind accumulate.

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire in April, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, had married, in 1557, Mary Arden, the daughter of a farmer at Wilmcote, near Stratford, a man of some means; at this time he was a successful tradesman, one of the leading citizens of Stratford, who made his income as farmer, glover, and dealer in wool. He continued to prosper for the next twelve years, but after that his trade declined, and for some years his affairs were in a bad way.

There is no reason to doubt the tradition that Shakespeare was educated for some years at Stratford Grammar School; but of his boyhood and adolescence nothing definite is known. When he was eighteen and

a half, he married by special licence—apparently in haste—Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer of Shottery, near Stratford. Anne was eight years his senior. Six months later (May, 1583) their first child, Susanna, was born; and in 1585, twins, Hamnet and Judith. Then follows a gap.

Seven years afterwards, in the autumn of 1592, occurs a sneering reference to "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide,* supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes fac totum,* is in his own conceit the only Shakes-scene in a country." This passage comes from *The Groatsworth of Wit bought with a million of Repentance,* written by Robert Greene the poet as he was dying. The line in italics is a parody of "Oh, tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide" (*III. Henry VI.*), and Greene's remarks are generally accepted by those competent to judge as the first reference to Shakespeare in literature.

Between 1585 and 1592, then, Shakespeare had left Stratford, come up to London and attracted some notice as a promising playwright. Tradition (furiously disputed) says that he was obliged to run from home because he had been caught stealing deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, a local magnate. In the following spring (April, 1593) Shakespeare presented his first work, the poem, *Venus and Adonis,* to the young Earl of Southampton, who gave him much encouragement, for when, a year later, he dedicated his second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece,* to Southampton, it is in these words: "The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours." Both poems were very popular.

In the summer of 1593 a great epidemic of the plague had broken out, with the result that all theatres were closed for nearly a year. When the plague subsided,

Shakespeare returned to the stage and joined the reorganised company of The Chamberlain's Men, who acted at The Theatre in Shoreditch. They remained at the Theatre for three years, during which time Shakespeare began to write great plays, and his friend Richard Burbage to act in them. To this period belong *Richard III.*, *Richard II.*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. In 1597 the company moved to another theatre in the neighbourhood, the Curtain, where probably *I.* and *II. Henry IV.* and *Henry V.* were first staged. They now decided to change their neighbourhood, and, leasing some land on the Bankside in Southwark, they built the Globe Theatre, which was finished in the summer of 1599.

Shakespeare's reputation was now growing rapidly, and with it his income. By 1596 his father had recovered from the lean years, and was petitioning the heralds for a coat of arms, the official recognition that he was a gentleman; the heralds refused for a time, but relented three years later. In 1597 Shakespeare bought New Place, one of the largest houses in Stratford, for £60; the next year, his Stratford friend, Richard Quyny, paid him the compliment of asking for a loan of £30, a very large sum at a time when ready money was scarce.

Shakespeare was now recognised as one of the great writers of his time, and a certain Francis Meres in a little book called *Palladis Tamia* (1598) equalled him with any dramatist of the past. Meres was more enthusiast than critic, but this judgment is a clear indication of Shakespeare's popularity.

Amongst the first plays at the Globe were the three comedies, *Much Ado*, *Twelfth Night*, and *As You Like It;* these were succeeded in the next five years by *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Lear*. Shakespeare was a shareholder in the Globe, and his investments were so prosperous that between 1602 and 1605 he was able to lay out a total of £760 in land and tithes at Stratford.

In 1603, when Queen Elizabeth died, the Chamberlain's players were taken over by King James, and henceforward known as The King's Men. Being now officially recognised, not only as respectable members of the community, but also as personal servants of the King, their affairs began to thrive. Under the old Queen playing was profitable but somewhat precarious, because the companies were much disliked by the city authorities and only allowed to exist, on the official pretext, at least, that they had to keep in practice to entertain the Queen when she wished to see them at Court. Now all was changed, and the King's Men acted frequently at Court. *Othello* was played there on November 1, 1604, and *Lear* was one of the Christmas plays in the winter of 1606.

About 1611, possibly earlier, Shakespeare retired from the stage; his name last appears in a play list of 1607. The rest of his life was spent at Stratford, with occasional visits to London. He certainly kept touch with his fellow-actors, and wrote an occasional play for them.

His son Hamnet had died as a boy; his elder daughter Susanna, was married in 1607 to Dr. John Hall, one of the best known physicians in the West of England; Judith was married in 1616 at the mature age of thirty.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. He had made a will three months previously, and this was hurriedly signed, without any fair copy being made, on March 25. The greater part of the property went to Susanna Hall, who inherited New Place; Judith received £300; the widow was not mentioned, except that by an afterthought, thrust in between two lines, she was given the second best bed with its furniture; whether this bequest was kindly or contemptuous, posterity has not yet decided. He also left 28s. 6d. to his fellow-actors Burbage, Heminge, and Condell to buy memorial rings. He was buried in the chancel of Stratford Church, and the pilgrim, after paying sixpence to enter the church, may see the stone (not the original) inscribed with a doggerel verse which covers the grave. A few years

after his death, a mural monument, made by Garet Jansen, a Southwark tombstone maker, was fixed on the north wall of the chancel. It includes a half-length bust of Shakespeare, who is shown holding a pen. This figure, and the engraving in the First Folio, are the only portraits which can be accepted without suspicion.

Fourteen of Shakespeare's plays were published separately during his lifetime, five others in a garbled form. In 1623, seven years after his death, a complete collection of his dramatic works was first issued in a large folio volume known as the First Folio.

The list of his plays, with their approximate dates, is as follows:

Play.	*First Published.*
Before 1593:	
Henry VI., three parts	Folio
Titus Andronicus	1594
Love's Labour's Lost	1598
Two Gentlemen of Verona ...	Folio
The Comedy of Errors	Folio
1594—1596:	
King John	Folio
The Taming of the Shrew ...	Folio
Richard III.	1597
Romeo and Juliet	1597 (pirated) 1599
Richard II.	1597
A Midsummer Night's Dream ...	1600
The Merchant of Venice	1600
All's Well that Ends Well ...	Folio
1597—1600:	
Henry IV., Part I.	1598
Henry IV., Part II.	1600
Henry V.	1600 (pirated) Folio

Merry Wives of Windsor ...	1602 (pirated) Folio
Much Ado About Nothing ...	1600
Twelfth Night	Folio
As You Like It	Folio

1601—1608:

Julius Cæsar	Folio
Hamlet	1603 (pirated) 1604
Macbeth	Folio
Othello	1622
Troilus and Cressida	1609
Measure for Measure	Folio
Lear	1608
Timon of Athens	Folio
Antony and Cleopatra	Folio
Coriolanus	Folio
Pericles	1609 (not in the Folio)

After 1608:

Cymbeline	Folio
The Winter's Tale	Folio
The Tempest	Folio
Henry VIII.	Folio

Such is a very brief outline of Shakespeare's life. It is the record of a level-headed, prudent Englishman of the middle class, and to the romantically minded so disappointing that some of them have tried to distil a story from the sonnets and the plays themselves. Yet there is no reason why it should have been otherwise, for a man is not less competent as an artist because he knows how to look after his savings; besides, "a man doubtful of his dinner or trembling at a creditor is not much disposed to abstracted meditation or remote inquiry." It need, therefore, cause no regret if Shakespeare's external life seems so devoid of startling adventures or amazing

vicissitudes. But the external life is unimportant; what matters is the record of his mind, and this is mirrored in the plays. Everyone who has read at all deeply in these plays knows what the author was like; his judgment, if he dare express it openly, will be: "This Shakespeare was a man very like myself; how otherwise could he have understood my own peculiar problems so acutely?"

His Stagecraft

Shakespeare learnt his craft in the best of all schools, the theatre itself. The Elizabethan public playhouse was simple compared with the modern theatre. It was open to the sky, and plays were acted by daylight. The spectators either stood in the yard or sat in the galleries which ran round inside. The stage itself was built out into the yard so that an actor standing in front could be seen on all sides; some protection from the weather was given by a roof supported on pillars. At the back, where the stage met the wall of the theatre, there were two doors, one on either side, through which the actors entered, and in the centre a recess or inner stage, concealed by a curtain; by drawing this curtain the recess could be used as part of the stage in such scenes as a cave or a study, or when a character is discovered in position at the beginning of the scene. Probably it was used more often, whenever a scene required a number of properties to be set out, such for instance as a throne room or a tavern; but there is not enough evidence to support any theory definitely, and the experts differ violently. Over the recess ran a gallery, a continuation of the spectators' gallery, which was also used when the play demanded a higher level, such as the walls of Berkeley Castle or Antony's tomb or Juliet's bedroom.

Costumes were costly and beautiful, and the supply of properties was generous. An inventory made for the Admiral's Men in 1598 contains such items as "a rock," "a cage," "Hell Mouth," "the City of Rome, "two

moss banks," "one great horse with his legs," and "two coffins," besides numerous smaller articles.

Now Shakespeare was a working dramatist, most concerned with the immediate success of his plays on the stage, and, being also an actor, he knew all there was to know about the limitations and advantages of his theatre. It is not surprising, then, if his plays written for the Elizabethan stage do not always seem to fit the modern. The peculiarities of his theatre have moulded his work in several ways.

On the projecting stage (usually known as the "apron stage") the actor came forward into the middle of the spectators, who might almost be said to have taken part in the play. The Elizabethan actor spoke to his audience, unlike the modern actor who pretends to be unaware of it. Hence there was nothing incongruous in the use of soliloquy, when the character left to himself eased his mind not only of observations on his own particular problems but of his opinions on more general topics, such as suicide, honour, the abuse of drink, the art of clowning, bastardy, and so forth. As the spectators enjoyed these recitations and expected them, Shakespeare gave them many purple patches, which are indeed part of the drama but yet seem to have been embroidered on a separate frame and sewn on afterwards. The long speech on general topics has largely disappeared from modern drama (except in the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw), and is now the perquisite of the Broadcasting Company.

The lack of a curtain which can descend and obliterate the stage meant that every scene, unless played on the back stage, had to begin with an entrance and end with an exit, so that there was no opportunity of concluding the scene at an effective climax. As a point of practice, most of Shakespeare's plays end with a procession, to wedding music in comedy, in a tragedy to a funeral march. Corpses were therefore a problem, as even in the gloomiest of last scenes sufficient survivors had to be left to remove the victims. Shakespeare is extremely

ingenious in the way in which he disposes of his dead. In *Hamlet,* Fortinbras and his army appear at the very end of the play so that Hamlet may be carried to his burial on the shoulders of four captains to the sound of trumpets and the boom of cannon. If this conclusion is omitted, as sometimes it is on the modern stage, the effect of the ending which Shakespeare intended is lost.

The simplicity of the arrangement of the back stage enabled scenes requiring large properties to be set while a small connecting scene was being played in front.* Moreover, convention was satisfied with properties instead of elaborate scenery, so that a throne indicated *A room in the palace,* an arbour *The orchard,* an altar *The church,* and a few artificial trees *The forest.* In the modern theatre the scenery takes so long to change that usually there are not more than four acts in a play. But Shakespeare was under no such restriction; his plays seldom contain less than twenty scenes, whilst in *Antony and Cleopatra* he has over forty. This rapid alternation of scene, by dividing the action and showing what would otherwise have to be narrated, enabled him to show his characters from every side. In modern editions of Shakespeare the locality of each scene is described in the heading; these notes are not to be found in the original texts, they were added by the editors of the eighteenth century. The locality of the action, unless it is important for the purposes of the plot that it should be named exactly, is usually left somewhat vague, though it will probably be indicated in the opening speeches. Shakespeare's scenes are, as it were, "Person-scenes" rather than "Place-scenes." When King Henry enters and sits on his throne, he is in his palace; when he appears wearing his armour, he is on the battlefield; the King, not his background, is the important factor.

This simplicity increases the pleasure in reading a

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* Some authorities hold that the properties were carried on in full view; whatever the arrangement, properties could be changed in a few seconds.

play of Shakespeare because the reader can concentrate in imagination on the characters without having to carry in his head the details of an elaborate setting.

The lack of stage illusion, and especially of realistic scenery and lighting, put more work on the author who had to rely on the effect of his own words to create the atmosphere of noon or midnight, spring or winter. It was not enough for his dialogue to be natural, he had to use every artifice of speech to appeal to the imagination of his audience. Hence the use of poetry to heighten the emotional appeal, of prose for a passage in a lower key.

Shakespeare is exceedingly skilful in the way he alternates prose and verse. Sometimes he will vary the tone of a scene by a verse passage succeeded by prose; sometimes he will show the difference between the character of two speakers by giving one prose speeches, the other verse.

Shakespeare's prose was always good; his control of verse developed and changed as he became more mature. This development can, for convenience, be divided into four periods.

In the earliest plays (roughly from the beginning to about 1597) the verse is regular, the stresses even, and the sentences usually end with the verse line. Metre seems at times to give difficulty, and the epithets occasionally appear to have been inserted to pad out the line to its full complement of syllables. Each line seems to be forged by itself. A typical, and good, passage from *The Taming of the Shrew* runs:

> Such duty as the subject owes the prince
> Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
> And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
> And not obedient to his honest will,
> What is she but a foul contending rebel
> And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
> I am ashamed that women are so simple
> To offer war where they should kneel for peace,

Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.

The Early Period passes gradually into the Balanced. At all times Shakespeare can write magnificent passages of poetry, but in the early plays the set piece is noticeably finer than its surroundings; in the later the whole effect is more even, and the dialogue is less concerned with fine sayings than with what is appropriate to the scene. The main difference between the Early and the Balanced styles is that as Shakespeare's experience deepened, his power of expressing it grew. Speeches are now written as a whole, in one sweep; run on lines become common, and, though the formal pattern of the verse remains, the stresses no longer tick like an ill-balanced grandfather clock.

The third period is the Overflowing, particularly noticeable in *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Gradually the metrical line and the formal scheme of five stresses is neglected. The thought now becomes too intense for expression, and Shakespeare, as it were, short-circuits his intuitions. The idea in his mind does not travel along the usual conductor of grammatical sentences, but leaps across in a flash in some mighty phrase which only a laborious paraphrase can reduce to grammar. These are such phrases as

Edgar—and pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy: my cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam,

or,

Our wishes on the way
May prove effects,

or,

Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame,
Be-monster not thy feature.

In the Final Period the disregard of metrical rules has increased, but now, though the thought is even deeper, the expression is perfect. At the end of his career

[illegible] by which it immediately [illegible] of Thing

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Shakespeare has achieved absolute command of language and the power to invest everything he says with its own proper emotional music; at the beginning he used a five-stringed lute, at the end an organ of the largest compass. Such speeches as Alonso's in *The Tempest,* beginning, "Oh, it is monstrous, monstrous," or Prospero's "These our actors," throb with the immensity of the power behind them.

An interesting way of seeing these changes in progress is to take a common thought as Shakespeare expressed it at different periods. Perhaps the remark most often heard in English poetry, in one form or another, is—

> To every man upon this earth
> Death cometh soon or late;

which has two pendent thoughts—"let us therefore die like men," or, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Richard II., when all is lost, plays with the idea of Death the leveller,

> within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court and there the antic sits,
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
> To monarchize, be fear'd and kill with looks,
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable, and humour'd thus
> Comes at the last and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!

Julius Cæsar, warned of the portents, replies:

> Cowards die many times before their deaths;
> The valiant never taste of death but once.
> Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
> It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
> Seeing that death, a necessary end,
> Will come when it will come.

This is the second Balanced Period. The thought may be seen gaining in intensity as Hamlet speaks to Horatio:

> Not a whit, we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all; since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be.

In the Overflowing Period the same thought is compressed to:

> Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
> Ripeness is all.

Finally, in *The Tempest,* Prospero sums up the whole problem in:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

Much rhyme, it has often been observed, is a sign of an early play; but there are exceptions to this general rule. At any time Shakespeare may use a rhymed couplet at the end of an episode or scene to emphasise its close; and, in the later plays, he sometimes inserts a rhymed speech of several lines for the definite purpose of making a sudden change in the emotional atmosphere. A most striking example occurs in the first scene in *Lear.* When Kent is banished for daring to oppose Lear's folly, he turns as he is going out, and says:

> Fare thee well, king: sith thus thou wilt appear,
> Freedom lives hence, and banishment is here.
> [*To* CORDELIA] The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
> That justly think'st, and hast mostly rightly said!
> [*To* REGAN *and* GONERIL] And your large speeches may your deeds approve,

That good effects may spring from words of love.
Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu;
He'll shape his old course in a country new.

Before and after this speech the metre of the dialogue is free and flexible; the sudden stiffening into these rigid couplets has the effect of a window opened, a chill blast of prophecy. It is the first indication that the tragedy of Lear has begun.

His Comedies

In the First Folio in 1623 the plays are divided into three groups, Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. The division is arbitrary and the arrangement haphazard, but since critics have from the first recognised the main divisions of comedy and tragedy, we may follow the lead of the editors of the First Folio and consider the plays under these groupings.

At the time when Shakespeare began to write, English criticism had not progressed very far. There are, it is true, several Elizabethan treatises, of which Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* is the most important; but there is little originality even in the *Apologie,* and Sidney borrowed most of his ideas from Aristotle and the critics of the Italian Renaissance. As a scholar he believed that all literature should have a high and moral purpose; he objected to English comedy because "our comedians think there is no delight without laughter," and he demanded that "all the end of the comical part be not upon such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only, but mixed with it, that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy."

Sidney wrote his *Apologie* about 1580; Shakespeare's earliest comedy—*Love's Labour's Lost*—dates from about 1593. It was not until 1598, when Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* was first staged by the Chamberlain's Men, that working dramatists began to take the "purpose of comedy" at all seriously. But Shakespeare

remained impenitently with the "naughty playmakers," who preferred entertainment to ethical instruction. Besides, he had too much sympathy with sinners ever to make a satisfactory preacher. At the same time his outlook is middle-class and moral. When his heroes fall in love they are rewarded with marriage; with dramatists of the smart set they prefer to commit adultery.

Nor are his comedies "problem plays," with the exception of *Measure for Measure,* which is a curious and unsatisfactory work. The duke leaves his dukedom in charge of a deputy, one Angelo, a man of austere life and a severe censor of morals. Angelo immediately re-enacts an old law punishing incontinence with death. Accordingly Claudio is arrested for seduction and condemned. Isabella, his sister, has entered on her novitiate in the religious life, but she is persuaded to leave the convent to plead with the deputy for her brother's life, with the result that her beauty and her passionate defence of Claudio's sin so inflame Angelo's suppressed desires that he offers to release Claudio at the price of her chastity. Isabella leaves him in disgust, goes to the prison and tells Claudio of the one condition on which he may live, fully expecting that he will uphold her honour. Claudio hesitates; he has tried to work himself into the proper feeling of resignation, but suddenly the thought of death, so near, overwhelms him, and he cries out:

Death is a fearful thing.

ISABELLA: And shamed life a hateful.

CLAUDIO: Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about

The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and uncertain thought
Imagine howling; 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

ISABELLA: Alas, alas!

CLAUDIO: Sweet sister, let me live;
What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far
That it becomes a virtue.

ISABELLA: O you beast!
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is 't not a kind of incest, to take life
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair!
For such a warped slip of wilderness
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed:
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.

The problem is fairly put; which is more valuable, Claudio's life or Isabella's chastity? But Shakespeare shirks an answer; instead, he sets into motion all the complicated machinery of disguised dukes and substituted lovers to produce a "happy ending," with Angelo, now penitent and ashamed, married off to the wronged Mariana, Claudio to his mistress, and the Duke to Isabella.

Even in the more sombre comedies of his later period, there is neither problem of conduct nor moral motive. They are more moving because more pregnant with meaning, but they convey no direct lesson.

Shakespeare's comedies are romantic; the characters

are indeed true to life and the men and women real enough, but they move in fanciful surroundings, and the actions forced upon them—apart from the actions which arise from their own natures—are, to say the least, improbable. For Shakespeare goes to an old play or a romance for his plots, and makes the persons come to life.

Romance has the great advantage over realism that fancies do not grow old, fashion changes in a week. Still, however romantic the story, the telling gives the dramatist his opportunity for considering all sorts of problems, and especially the ways of a man with a maid. Shakespeare has, too, the gift of universality, which alone gives permanence to literature. His characters recur in every generation; they remain individuals, but yet they are types. Nor are his comedies all laughter; being true to life, they are full of mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage.

Love's Labour's Lost is probably the earliest complete play which Shakespeare wrote. The plot, unlike most, seems to be original, and is highly artificial and stagey. The King of Navarre and his three followers, Berowne, Longaville and Dumain, have sworn to retire from the world and study for three years without sight of woman. Berowne alone sees that not only is this ideal plan contrary to human nature and therefore impracticable, but must, as a matter of detail, be upset on the very first day because the Princess of France is at that moment expected as ambassador for her old father. The Princess and her ladies arrive and are civilly entertained; but very soon each of the students falls in love and breaks his oath; all then enlist as Cupid's soldiers. They entertain the ladies with a masque, hoping to win them over, but their revels are brought abruptly to an end when a messenger arrives with the news that the Princess's father is dead. The ladies enjoin a twelve month's fast on their lovers and go home. Mixed up with this story is an underplot of Don Adriano de Armado, the Spanish braggart knight, Sir Nathaniel the curate, Holo-

phernes the pedant, and the rest of their circle; their adventures gained in interest for the original audience who recognised them as caricatures of certain unpopular contemporaries.

Love's Labour's Lost is not an easy play to read, nor has it ever been very popular except with those curious persons who regard Shakespeare's plays as one vast cryptogram. Being written for a small and courtly audience, it is full of topical jokes which have long since become quite incomprehensible; it is in fact more of a musical comedy than serious drama, but all the same there is plenty of life in it still when it is acted; for the play needs the living actor to bring out the full meaning. The scene, for instance, where each of the four students, having secretly fallen in love, comes in reading a sonnet to his beloved and is in turn denounced by the others, is intended as much for the eye as for the ear; it would be equally effective on the cinema. The play, in short, is a young man's play, full of wit and brilliance, but not to be compared with the later comedies. It belongs to the period when Shakespeare was being made the pet of the smart circle of Southampton and his friends. Fortunately he escaped, or was dropped by, this set, and was thenceforward obliged to write plays as a commercial dramatist; for he owed a great debt to the despised groundlings and ordinary folk who made up the greater part of his audience.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is another play written for private performance for some wedding. This meant that Shakespeare had more material at hand than in his own theatre; there was probably adequate scenery, good music, and, most important of all, a company of young children to act the parts of the fairies. It is worth noting that *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* another court play, also ends with a dance of children dressed as fairies.

The plot opens with the announcement of Duke Theseus' wedding day; what follows is a glorious medley of three quite incongruous elements, the ladies

and gentleman of Athens, the fairies, and the hard-handed men of Athens, who prepare a play in honour of their Duke.

The respectable mortals, especially Lysander and Demetrius, are not a very interesting set, and their speech is usually wooden, though Helena and Hermia, when they get angry with each other, show more life. Theseus and Hippolyta are much more distinct. Theseus has had considerable experience as a lover and a soldier, and has now reached the period in life when he wants to settle down; he is too old for romantic nonsense. When Hippolyta tells him of the strange adventures of the lovers, he replies with easy tolerance:

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
> That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name—

not a very gallant speech from the bridegroom on his wedding night; but then the marriage is scarcely a love match.

Hippolyta, too, has character; she is an Amazon, a haughty and muscular lady, with no patience for the amateurish efforts of Bottom and company. The contrast between the two is well shown in their comments at the play; the lady is bored and contemptuous, Theseus gracious to the least of his subjects. It is not a good beginning to the marriage; but then one notices that Theseus can always talk her down.

All the artisans are cunningly drawn, each with his own peculiarities, though Quince and Bottom stand out.

Quince seems to be the older man, and there are indications that he is a bit of a poet. He is a man of great tact, the only person, not excluding the Duke, who can in any way handle Bottom.

Bottom is Shakespeare's best picture of the British working man; stolid, unimaginative, and imperturbable, but a considerable wag in his own way. He holds his own in the play scene when all the audience jeer at him, and he subdues them to silence when lesser men, such as the miserable Snout, are easily put out of their parts and give up in despair. He is not even surprised when Titania falls in love with him; it is quite natural, the girls always do.

And then there are the fairies; they are little folk, so small that a snakeskin is "weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in," and, like the people of Lilliput, their loves and hates mock the passions of grown mortals. The play being a dream is full of inconsistency. So long as the daylight holds, the fairies are hidden, but once the moon is up, things of common day fade and the woods become fairyland. Then mortals are gross intruders and are rightly punished for their trespass. When daylight returns, the events of the night are forgotten, or remembered only as a confused dream. Then comes the play and we are back again with common humanity; and yet, when all the lovers have gone bedward, the fairies swarm out, and we are not sure in the end which was dream and which was reality.

The Merchant of Venice shows a great advance in craftsmanship, and presents one most interesting critical problem in the character of Shylock. What did Shakespeare think of Shylock? Was he simply indulging in the popular pastime of Jew-baiting, or did he regard him —as some modern actors interpret the part—as a member of an ancient and much wronged people, a dignified contrast to the Christian Venetians, who at one moment spit upon his Jewish gabardine, at the next come cringing for a loan? Both interpretations can be supported from the play. When Antonio comes to borrow money

of Shylock, the feeling is all with the Jew, and again when he hears the news of his worthless little daughter who has robbed him to run away with Lorenzo; but in the trial scene he overreaches himself in his lust for Antonio's blood. He is defeated by a trick of the law, but none of those present have the least sympathy for him, and they think that he has been treated with surprising leniency when he is allowed to keep half of his wealth. On the whole, it is more probable that Shakespeare had little sentiment for Shylock; but he was making a man and not a monster.

Portia's surrender to Bassanio is a most moving passage of love poetry:

> You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
> Such as I am: though for myself alone
> I would not be ambitious in my wish,
> To wish myself much better; yet, for you
> I would be trebled twenty times myself;
> A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
> More rich;
> That only to stand high in your account,
> I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
> Exceed account; but the full sum of me
> Is sum of something, which, to term in gross,
> Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised;
> Happy in this, she is not yet so old
> But she may learn; happier than this,
> She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
> Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.

Yet there is something rather feline about Portia, and from time to time she puts out her claws to play with Shylock in the court or to torment Bassanio over the ring. Bassanio may be a worthless young spendthrift, but there is a "predestinate scratched face" for him if he plays false twice.

The last act of the play, when the lovers meet in the

moonlight, is a triumphant vindication of the bare Elizabethan stage. There was no limelight then, and yet how perfectly Shakespeare created the sense of a warm evening as Lorenzo and Jessica sit and look at the stars.

About 1598-99, Shakespeare wrote his three most popular comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night,* and *As You Like It.*

The problems of *Much Ado* have greatly excited the critics. They are not very noticeable on the stage, but they certainly obtrude when the play is read. The plot, as usual, is complex, three stories all running parallel; the love affairs of Hero and Claudio, the trap set for Benedick and Beatrice, and the plot of Don John, which is foiled by Dogberry and his watch. The Hero-Claudio story again subdivides into three parts; the proxy wooing, the repudiation, and Hero's final restoration. This part of the play is weak, highly melodramatic, and, to modern readers, almost offensive, because the marriage of Claudio and Hero affronts the sense of justice.

The play begins with the return of Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon, from the wars with his officers, amongst whom are Claudio and Benedick; they are welcomed home by Leonato, the Governor of Messina, his daughter, Hero, and his niece, Beatrice. Claudio, who had been attracted before the campaign, now falls in love with Hero and asks the Prince to arrange the business with Leonato. Then follows a masked dance; Don John, the Prince's bastard brother, a warped villain, easily persuades Claudio that the Duke is wooing Hero for himself. But when Don Pedro, Leonato, Hero and Claudio next meet, Don Pedro, to Claudio's amazement, explains that all is well; Leonato gladly gives his consent; Hero says nothing; and the two are betrothed. This ends the first scene of the second act. Shakespeare has therefore spent a whole act in tying up a tangle which falls apart at once. Why, ask critics, these unnecessary complications?

Scholars have pointed out that the play, as it exists in its present version, seems to have been written in two

different periods; the Hero-Claudio story being the earlier *stratum*. When Shakespeare came to rewrite it, he expanded the Benedick-Beatrice story, and so, to keep the play at the right length, he was obliged to cut out much of the Hero-Claudio plot; hence some necessary explanations are missing from Act I. Moreover, it is noticeable that much of the Hero-Claudio is written in verse of Shakespeare's earlier style, while the Benedick-Beatrice story is mostly in prose. This view is probably right, but it is not the whole truth. The retention of many passages of early verse may, in fact, be justified on æsthetic grounds, and Shakespeare, unless he was extremely careless or hurried, had a good dramatic reason for his first act. The effect, and presumably the intention, is to make the audience impatient with the egregious Claudio; though he has been deceived by Don John, that Don Pedro is false to him, he again believes Don John when he defames Hero.

Claudio is one of those men who never learn by experience; his real trouble is overwhelming conceit; he feels that he is honouring Hero by proposing to marry her. No one is more easily deceived than a thoroughly conceited man, for it never occurs to him that anyone would dare to cheat so worthy a person as himself. And everyone encourages him in this belief. Even after his outrageous behaviour in the church, Leonato is only too delighted to welcome him back again as his son-in-law. But if Shakespeare did not mean us to like Claudio, he had little affection for Hero or for any of the meek maidens who cannot speak up for themselves. Hero is dutifully obedient to her father, much to Beatrice's contempt:

> Yes, faith; it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say, "Father, as it please you." Yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy and say, "Father, as it please me."

The meek Hero suffers almost without a protest. Had Rosalind been bride, the church scene would have

ended differently; Claudio would have said just five words, and for the rest of his life walked dumb and blind.

Still, it must be admitted that even Claudio and the Prince do accept ridiculously slight evidence of Hero's unfaithfulness. Borachio, directly after he has played his part in Don John's little dream, explains it all to Conrade:

> Know that I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero; she leans me out at her mistress' chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good night—I tell this tale vilely: I should first tell thee how the Prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.
>
> CONRADE: And thought they Margaret was Hero?
>
> BORACHIO: Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio; but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged; swore he would meet her as he was appointed, next morning at the temple, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw o'ernight and send her home again without a husband.

It was too dark to see, it was too far off to hear, and yet Claudio believed. This passage between Conrade and Borachio is a good example of Shakespeare's method of plotting a play. There are in the main two ways of telling a story of misunderstandings. The first, and the commonest, is to keep the audience in the dark until the very end and then to explain all the difficulties in the last five minutes. In this method the whole dramatic interest is surprise; our enjoyment of the play is spoilt if

anyone tells us what to expect. Had Shakespeare told his story thus, the audience would have been kept in ignorance that Hero was really innocent.

But Shakespeare prefers dramatic irony and suspense to surprise; his method is to show the spectators what is going to happen so that they may watch how the characters are unconsciously deceiving themselves and each other. When Borachio tells Conrade (and the audience as well) that Hero is to be denounced, our interest is to see whether Dogberry and his watch will get their story over to Leonato in time, so that the scene which follows is pregnant with suspense. Dogberry is too pompous to deliver his news, Leonato too flurried with the wedding to listen; and so we stand behind Fate as she moves the pieces.

But the greatness of this play lies in the comedy of Benedick and Beatrice. In real life it is not uncommon to find two people—usually of different sexes—who instinctively tease, because, being secretly afraid of each other, they defend themselves by attacking. They will be horrified if a candid friend tells them that they are in love, and will probably end by marrying—as do Benedick and Beatrice when mutual friends arrange for them to overhear certain conversations.

When Benedick is first caught he ends his soliloquy thus:

> I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? a man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

It is the same Benedick, in love or out. But it is very different with Beatrice. The heroines in the romantic comedies, for all their doublet and hose, are weak and

womanly. Rosalind faints at the sight of blood; Viola is terrified by the wavering sword of Sir Andrew; Beatrice, when she is persuaded that Benedick loves her, breaks out into this amazing declaration:

> What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
> Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
> Contempt farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!
> No glory lives behind the back of such.
> And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
> Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:
> If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
> To bind our loves up in a holy band;
> For others say thou dost deserve, and I
> Believe it better than reportingly.

This is the reason why Shakespeare left the passages of early verse in this play. Beatrice's mannishness is put on, like armour, to defend a sensitive girl who is afraid of falling in love; and this sudden raising of the dialogue into a rhymed stanza is a most effective way of showing it.

Twelfth Night can be read, and played, in two moods. The usual and popular conception is that this is the happiest and most delightful of all Shakespeare's plays, full of admirable fooling and good sentimentality, a gallimaufry of gambols. Another mood haunts many who saw Mr. Granville Barker's memorable production in 1912; the feeling expressed by Shelley in:

> We look before and after,
> And pine for what is not;
> Our sincerest laughter
> With some pain is fraught.
> Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

This sadness is not in the plot, which is high fantastical, nor in the persons, but in the music; of the songs, "Come away, come away, Death," and "When that I was and a little tiny boy," with its note of hope-

lessness that ends the play, "For the rain it raineth every day"; even more haunting in the lyric beauty of some of the speeches, such as Viola's when she murmurs her love for Orsino:

> My father had a daughter loved a man,
> As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
> I should your lordship.
> ORSINO: And what's her history?
> CESARIO: A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief.

But perhaps it is wrong to stress this mood. In Sir Walter Raleigh's words:

> These plays, after all, are comedies of intrigue; the pattern is very elaborate; and it would be ridiculous to discuss the characters seriously, were it not that Shakespear has worked so much of real and living character into the scheme, that we are emboldened thereby to ask him for the impossible. If all the characters are to live, the plot would have to be simpler and less symmetrical. All are, at least, most happily adapted to the light uses of comedy. The world in which they move is a rainbow world of love in idleness.

Orsino, the Duke, and Olivia, the Countess, enjoy melancholy. His melancholy is the lover's, which—as Jaques had observed—includes all the other melancholies; it is a pleasing form of the malady, finding easy relief in music and sweet beds of flowers; and with little trace of the burning forehead and the parching tongue. For Orsino has reached that stage of growth when a young man thinks of matrimony and looks about for a mate

whom he may invest with the attributes of a romantic lover; not the most passionate form of love, but the commonest.

Olivia repulses him because she is at the moment too preoccupied with the delights of an extravagant sorrow. Once she is touched by the sight of Cesario, she becomes as extravagant in love; she loses all self-control, and, in a less beautiful world, would have been brought to open scandal, but for the exquisite tact and sympathy of Viola. Small wonder that the vitality of Viola should attract them both; for Viola, believing that her twin brother is drowned, has more cause than either for melancholy; but she daffs it aside, and seeks an antidote for sorrow in adventure.

The third person in the play who prefers to toy with fancies is Malvolio; a great man, in his own way, the ruler of a great lady's house. His austerity is oppressive, and his air of conscious godliness, his dislike of cakes and ale, are maddening to his subordinates; yet there is need of sternness in a household that includes Sir Toby and Maria. But underneath his chain of office beats a very sentimental heart; Maria once told him that his lady did affect him, and he feeds on languishing thoughts of love which form themselves into very definite day-dreams of what might be; to be Count Malvolio; to extend the hand, with an austere regard of control, to the detested Toby. At this unfortunate moment he comes on the fatal letter.

Sebastian's behaviour is a little surprising, and his marriage with Olivia is, to say the least, hasty. But then considerable allowance must be made for Sebastian. The moment he strays near Olivia's house his world turns upside down. First the fool, whom he has never seen before, salutes him familiarly with a message from an unknown lady; while he is still puzzled, Andrew assaults him, and in a moment he is involved in a duel with Sir Toby. Then out comes the beautiful unknown and invites him, very cordially, into her house. At this point he resigns himself to Fate, and lets the dream take

its course. At least marriage with the lady is a very delightful sequel to the previous nightmare.

Twelfth Night gives the feeling of a June morning when the wild roses are a reminder that time is a-flying. The third of the comedies, *As You Like It,* seems rather to be set in August. The morning is stormy, but soon the sunshine seems just a little oppressive, and it is likely that the cream will be sour before night.

> "Shakspere," remarked Professor Dowden, "when he wrote this idyllic play, was himself in his Forest of Arden. He had ended one great ambition—the historical plays—and not yet commenced his tragedies. It was a resting place. He sends his imagination into the woods to find repose. Instead of the court and camps of England and the embattled plains of France, here was this woodland scene, where the palm tree, the lioness, and the serpent are to be found; possessed of a flora and fauna that flourish in spite of physical geographers. There is an open-air feeling throughout the play. The dialogue, as has been observed, catches freedom and freshness from the atmosphere. After the trumpet tones of *Henry V.*, comes the sweet pastoral strain, so bright, so tender. Must it not be all in keeping? Shakspere was not trying to control his melancholy. When he needed to do that, Shakspere confronted his melancholy very passionately, and looked it full in the face. Here he needed refreshment, a sunlight tempered by the forest-boughs, a breeze upon the forehead, a stream murmuring in his ears."

Those who regard Shakespeare as a god controlling his own destiny and planning, some ten years ahead, the order and motive of his plays, may find this judgment elevating. But a little closer examination of *As You Like It* will show not a few traces of a feeling that comes very near to cynicism, and if Shakespeare is here writing pastoralism to order, he does it self-consciously, not with-

out a twinge of his artistic conscience. In fact, quite a good case can be made out for Mr. Bernard Shaw's remark that:

> when Shakespeare was forced to write popular plays to save his theatre from ruin, he did it mutinously, calling the plays "As *You* Like it," and "Much Ado About Nothing." All the same he did it so well that to this day these two genial vulgarities are the main Shakespearian stock-in-trade of our theatres.

There are, it is true, plenty of the conventional pastoral types in *As You Like It;* Rosalind, disguised as a forester, Celia as a shepherdess (without any visible sheep), Orlando pinning very bad verses on the trees; as well as Corin, Silvius, and Phebe, all delicately poising sheep-crooks, adorned with a neat bow of ribbon. It would be perfect Arcadia if only Shakespeare had omitted William and Audrey, two real yokels, most distasteful contrasts to their imitators. There is, too, always some-one to be slightly malicious whenever the forest lovers become at all sentimental.

Rosalind, alias Ganymede, after hearing the sighs of the lovelorn Silvius, murmurs:

> Alas, poor shepherd! searching of thy wound,
> I have by hard adventure found mine own.

And Touchstone, remembering the chain which Rosalind had so prettily given to Orlando, immediately rejoins:

> And I mine. I remember, when I was in love, I broke my sword upon a stone and bid him take that for coming a-night to Jane Smile; and I remember the kissing of her batlet, and the cow's dugs that her pretty chopt hands had milked; and I remember the wooing of a peascod instead of her, from whom I took two cods, and, giving her them again, said, with weeping tears, "Wear these for

my sake." We, that are true lovers, run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly.

Touchstone is an incurable cynic; when old Corin propounds his simple philosophy that "the property of rain is to wet, and fire to burn," he retorts simply that Corin is damned like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side. Even Rosalind has little patience with the sentimentalities of her romantic lover, who would die for love. "Men have died from time to time," she observes, "and the worms have eaten them, but not for love."

The others in the forest, the banished Duke and his followers, fleeting the time carelessly like old Robin Hood of England, also have their tormentor in Jaques, who refuses to delude himself into the easy optimism of seeing good in everything, or the amiable fancy that "sweet are the uses of adversity."

Jaques indeed is the most notable person in the play, a symptom of a change in Shakespeare's methods. Hitherto he had balanced his plot and his characterisation; henceforward he is more interested in character. He tends to pick out one or two persons in the play and to show their character from every angle, by bringing them into contact with a variety of persons and situations. Jaques is a notable example, for he exists simply as a study of character; he does nothing of the slightest importance in the plot, and he could be left out without injury to the story. But the play would be insipid without him. More is shown of Jaques than of any other in the play; he is not even allowed to appear until his entrance has been carefully prepared by an account of his moods and moralisings.

There are, of course, explanations for this new method other than the whim of a god. There was a remarkable change at this time in the interest of playgoers and playwrights, the beginnings of a heightened interest in psychology and problems of character, especially as revealed in the curious manifestation known as the

"melancholick humour." Jaques is a mild case, Hamlet's disease is serious, Timon's hopeless. The interest in the various forms of melancholy culminated, about twenty years later, in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

The Winter's Tale, which was written late in Shakespeare's career, is more moving on the stage than in the reading; the statue scene especially needs the presence of living actors to bring out the full emotional effect. It is a play in Shakespeare's grand manner, though the construction breaks into two because of the interval of time between the third and fourth acts, inadequately bridged by the entrance of Time with his hour-glass to proclaim that sixteen years have gone by. This blemish also is more apparent to the reader who has already formed his impressions of Leontes and Polixenes from the first act and must revise them in the fourth; the spectator needs only a glance at Leontes to see the outward effects of time.

The first three acts are charged with tragedy. At the beginning of the play Leontes has caused his friend Polixenes much embarrassment by insisting that he shall prolong his visit. He is piqued by Polixenes' refusal, and still more when Hermione succeeds where he has failed. Brooding over this, his unbalanced mind is suddenly filled with the thought that Hermione has stronger motives than he for detaining Polixenes, and at once he is possessed by the raging devil of jealousy. The more incredulous his courtiers become, the deeper is he involved in the consequences of his folly. Hence he gambles on an appeal to the oracle of Apollo, because he knows that there is no proof of Hermione's guilt. Once Apollo is invoked, the god assumes direction of events. The oracle is opened at the trial of Hermione, and the answer is clear and unequivocal:

> Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten; and the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found.

Still Leontes refuses to yield; he spurns the judgment of the god, and immediately he is blasted by the divine wrath. It is the familiar tragedy of the weak man who mistakes obstinacy for strength and breaks himself rather than acknowledge his own mistakes. But his repentance is as extravagant as his grief.

The link between the first part and the second is in the scene (III., iii.) where Antigonus abandons Hermione's babe Perdita on the "sea coast of Bohemia." Once again Shakespeare makes his audience like God's spies by showing that Perdita is safe; he does not, however, tell them that Hermione also lives.

Sixteen years later Perdita has grown up into a beautiful girl, the natural queen of the shepherds. The story now moves quickly. Shakespeare had lingered over the first three acts and to keep the play within its proper limits, he was obliged to compress the last two. Florizel and Perdita to avoid the wrath of Polixenes flee to Leontes in Sicilia, whither he pursues them and all is explained. But it is noticeable that Shakespeare shows neither the reconciliation of Polixenes and Leontes, nor the revelation of Perdita's origin, nor the meeting of father and daughter. This omission has been much condemned by critics; thus Sir Arthur Quiller Couch:

> To be sure, if we choose to tread foot with Gervinus and agree that "the poet has *wisely* placed this event behind the scenes, otherwise the play would have been too full of powerful scenes"; if, having been promised a mighty thrill, in the great master's fashion, we really prefer two or three innominate gentlemen entering and saying, "Have you heard?" "You don't tell me!" "No?" "Then you have lost a sight." I say, if we really prefer this sort of thing, which Gervinus calls "in itself a rare masterpiece of prose description," then Heaven must be our aid.

But Gervinus—and Shakespeare—are right. Had these events been shown, not only would the final explanations

have been prolonged, but the emotion of the audience would have been dribbled away before the great climax. As it is, the emotion continues to swell until it is at last released in one great flood at the restoration of Hermione.

The Tempest was Shakespeare's last play. In its present form it was prepared as a wedding play for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Frederick of the Palatine in 1612.

It begins with one of his favourite openings, a quickly moving scene; in this instance, on board a ship at sea. There is no need for scenery; without any preliminary explanations Shakespeare takes just eight lines to create the whole atmosphere:

> MASTER: Boatswain!
>
> BOATSWAIN: Here, master. What cheer?
>
> MASTER: Good, speak to the mariners; fall to't yarely, or we run ourselves aground; bestir, bestir.
>
> *Enter* Mariners.
>
> BOATSWAIN: Heigh, my hearts! cheerly, cheerly, my hearts! yare, yare! Take in the topsail. Tend to the master's whistle. Blow, till thou burst thy wind, if room enough!

Thereafter the play preserves the Unity of Time, the whole action taking the same time on the stage as in real life—no small technical achievement in a play dealing with two generations. To produce this effect an explanation of what has gone before is necessary, and this is given in the second scene when Prospero tells Miranda how and why they have come to be on the island.

There is some difference of opinion about this scene, and on its true understanding depends the interpretation of the character of Prospero. The common view, amongst dramatic critics, is that the scene, though technically excellent, is somewhat inclined to be hard; Prospero, as he tells his story, keeps interjecting, "Thou attend'st not," "Dost thou hear," as if he were a schoolmaster trying to keep the attention of a restive class in

a dull lesson; Miranda, too, seems a little lacking in politeness. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch explains this as due to

> the abstracted mind of Miranda as she listens with a kind of *feyness* to the story so important on which her father, having chosen and prepared the moment, so impatiently insists. It is, to our thinking, most necessary to realise that Miranda is all the while less absorbed by this important story than by the sea, out of which her fairy prince is surely coming, though his coming can scarcely be surmised as yet.

But there is another and more satisfying explanation. Hitherto Miranda has learnt nothing of her father's past; now she must know. Prospero has been a failure as a duke; he had neglected his duties for his studies, and their twelve years of exile have been the punishment for himself—and for Miranda. It is a humiliating moment for him, for he must come before his daughter for judgment. Moreover, it is the first time he has ever told the story aloud. And so, very diffident, very anxious, he lives again in the past and speaks musingly, rather to himself than to her. His ejaculations, very gentle, are partly to himself because he speaks so softly that Miranda can scarcely hear him, partly incoherent pleas for her sympathy. Miranda says little; not that she is heartless or inattentive, she is too amazed to speak, not knowing what strange story will come next.

The Tempest is a play of reconciliation. Some hold that Prospero changes his mind and did not intend reconciliation but revenge until Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love. It is unlikely. Prospero is always in control of everything that happens on the island; he has deliberately brought the ship thither, and he hopes that Ferdinand and Miranda may fall in love. When Miranda first sees her fairy prince, Prospero murmurs:

> It goes on, I see,
> As my soul prompts it.

To the Elizabethans this was the ideal match. "It is a style," said Fuller, "too princely for a parent herein to will and command, but sure he may will and desire." The comparison of this passage with the scene in *Hamlet* where the ghost unfolds its story to Hamlet is notable. In both a father wronged by a brother addresses his child. There is indeed a difference; Hamlet's father was "confined to fast in fires"; Prospero, in similar circumstances, might have been less magnanimous. Still, the opening of *The Tempest* has all the beginnings of a Revenge Play, and Shakespeare was conscious of this difference. Prospero, when his work is now almost complete, says to Ariel:

> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance.

There is none of the cynicism of *As You Like It* here, or in *The Winter's Tale,* towards either the simplicity of the pastoral life, or love, or the nobler ideals of conduct. There are cynics in *The Tempest*—Sebastian and Antonio—but they are conspicuously labelled Bold, Bad Men.

His Histories

A dramatist who takes history as his material loses as much as he gains. The great characters of history are familiar, and even a bad play about a popular hero will find an audience prepared to be sympathetic. But, as no dramatist dare tamper with the outline of the story, many historical plays are little better than a series of *tableaux*.

English historical plays belong to four main groups. The first is the Pageant Play, where the chief interest lies in recreating the splendours of the past. "His Majesty's Theatre," under the late Sir Herbert Tree, was famous for this kind of play; but the tradition goes

right back to the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare's own Globe Theatre was burnt to the ground during a performance of *Henry VIII.*, remarkable for the lavishness of its setting.

The second type portrays "The Hero as King," and the career of the hero (or villain for that matter) is shown in a series of rather loosely connected scenes. Shakespeare's *Richard III.* and *Henry V.* are rather of this kind, though the best Elizabethan example is Marlowe's *Tamburlaine.* This episodic method has reappeared in recent years in *Abraham Lincoln, Cromwell,* and *Robert E. Lee,* which are constructed on the *Tamburlaine* plan, though these genteel modern heroes have little in common with Marlowe's ranting shepherd.

In the third kind, historical movements and causes are symbolised in individuals. Thus in *King John* the Kings of England and France in person conduct a lengthy argument about the legality of Arthur's claim to the throne, harangue the citizens of Angiers, fight a battle, arrange a marriage, and patch up an alliance all in the first scene of the second act. Both Kings here stand for their respective countries. This symbolical method was revived in the greatest historical play since Shakespeare—*Saint Joan*—with the difference that history is here regarded—in the manner of modern historians—as the result of certain forces of evolution or reaction. The author of *I. Henry VI.* (who was probably not Shakespeare) makes York and Warwick burn Joan as a witch and a strumpet; Mr. Bernard Shaw burns her as an individualistic principle. The symbolic type of play derived from the Morality Play, and had Mr. Bernard Shaw written in the sixteenth century he would have given his persons such names as the Lady Heresy, Ecclesiastical Justice or Ancient Nobility, for in *Saint Joan* the persons are shown as representatives of the class; we see nothing of Warwick at home or Joan amongst the private soldiers. This does not in any way lessen the greatness of *Saint Joan;* but it is worth noting that Shakespeare abandoned the symbolic method early,

and in his great historical plays showed history as the result rather of the personal ambitions of men than of economic laws.

Historians reflect their own age in their methods. In a modern bureaucratic state, individual statesmen have little freedom of action, and they are seldom spectacular in their appearance or their mannerisms; Mr. Baldwin's pipe is a poor substitute for Sir Walter Raleigh's cloak. But in the days of Shakespeare men like Leicester or Essex were so splendidly conspicuous in all they did that chroniclers (including such experienced politicians as Bacon, who wrote a life of Henry VII.), if unscientific, were not unreasonable in regarding the great men, rather than the Guild of Clothworkers, as the real makers of history.

Shakespeare's conception of history as the interplay of character is well shown in Hotspur, who is shown in the Court, in the council chamber, and in his own home, so that we may have a complete picture of the man; for Hotspur's character was more important in the play of *Henry IV.* than his cause.

The series of historical plays from *Richard II.* to *Richard III.* illustrate one main theme—"The Curse of the House of Lancaster." They were not originally written as a sequence; *Henry VI.*, in its three parts, came first, and little of it is by Shakespeare, but the idea runs all through.

Richard II. is a good example of Shakespeare's method of treating history as the conflict of individuals. In the original editions the play is called *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second,* and rightly so. Shakespeare is not concerned with that patch of history briefly summarised as

RICHARD II., 1377 TO 1399,

but with the failure and death of the man who happened to be king at that time. The tragedy of Richard is not that he ended miserably but that he wrought his own destruction. He fails for two causes, the one physical,

the other spiritual; the first is his cousin Henry Bolingbroke, whom he wrongs, the second is his lack of mental honesty. Richard is weak, selfish, unscrupulous, and sensitive, with all the qualities, good and bad, of the artistic temperament. He would be a success in the studio, but as king he is wrongly placed. Bolingbroke has none of Richard's weaknesses and none of his virtues, and, in the material, physical struggle between them, naturally the stronger man wins; but the final victory is with Richard in a more subtle, spiritual contest. It occurs in the Deposition scene. Richard has been summoned to appear before the lords of the realm to make a ceremonial surrender of his crown. It is one of those emotional occasions when the plain man is self-conscious and the artist in his element. The moment he enters Richard attracts all eyes, and having nothing to lose further, he has nothing worse to fear. As an artist he enjoys the spectacle of his own tragedy, and he draws the last drop of pathos from his formal renunciation:

Now mark me, how I will undo myself:
I give this heavy weight from off my head
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duty's rites:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I forgo;
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny:
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbroke that swear to thee!
Make me, that nothing have, with nothing griev'd,
And thou with all pleas'd, that hast all achiev'd!
Long may'st thou live in Richard's seat to sit,
And soon lie Richard in a earthy pit!
God save King Harry, unking'd Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshine days!

And so uncrowned, with a smile of mockery, he is led out of the presence of the silent king, leaving behind him the Curse on the House of Lancaster. The conception of the play is magnificent; unfortunately the dialogue, except for some fine passages, falls far short.

In the first part of *Henry IV.*, Shakespeare continued the story. Some years have passed since the murder of Richard; Henry IV. has now paid for his triumphs. He is harassed by constant rebellions, uneasy in conscience, and sick at heart because his son, Prince Henry, seems to be a vicious young wastrel, another Richard. Of its kind, *I. Henry IV.* is the most perfect play that Shakespeare ever wrote; every character is completely drawn, and the main action is admirably balanced.

Henry has reached the throne by the help of the Percies—Northumberland and his son Hotspur—but once his power is established, he resents their independence and determines to bring them to heel. They refuse to submit and rebel. The first part of the play shows the defeat of Hotspur, who is killed by Prince Henry at the battle of Shrewsbury; the second carries the story to the death of Henry and the succession of his son. With *Henry V.* the two parts form a trilogy, which might almost be called "The Education of a Prince."

It is easy to mistake Shakespeare's intention in these plays, and some critics, full of admiration for Henry V.'s patriotic outbursts, have concluded that he is Shakespeare's ideal hero; others, to whom the idea of an efficient man of action is abhorrent, talk of him as "a careless and callous man who has struggled only in two minutes of his life, one, when he played a practical joke upon some thieves, a second time when he killed Hotspur, the brilliant intellect, the miracle of men." The second judgment is even farther from the truth than the first. Hotspur is by no means a "brilliant intellect"; in fact, the main reason for his failure is that he has no brains and no self-control; he is a sworder, a man who can hew his way through in a battle, but when

clear thought is needed at the council table, he only can prate about his honour or quarrel over his share of the plunder.

But a more dangerous charge laid against Prince Hal is that he rejected Falstaff. It is worth examining.

Falstaff is the greatest comic character in all literature; he commits most of the sins in the decalogue; he robs the poor, he is a liar and a drunkard, and he fights no longer than he sees reason. And yet everyone loves him. He is the gross embodiment of all that is most lovable in the human animal, the best of those undesirable friends whom a young man does not introduce to his people. He is perpetually a good joke, not only in his wit, but in his person; for he is colossally fat. The sensitive may perhaps deplore the vulgarity of fatness; but Falstaff is a vulgar person, and to common, coarse mortals, there is something essentially comic in a large paunch, a sausage, or an undertaker in his glory. Life being a good jest, death is no joke at all, and so, to Falstaff, life is preferable to many things which most men value more highly, honour, for instance. In fact, Shakespeare very deliberately contrasts Falstaff's brief catechism on Honour with Hotspur's fine speeches:

> Honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? what is that honour? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism.

It is not heroic, but then Falstaff is scarcely the build for a romantic hero. Moreover, Falstaff survives and Percy

does not, which is a powerful argument, from Falstaff's point of view at least, that a live ass is better than a dead hero.

Now a joke must be an affair of the present or it grows stale, and Falstaff, until the end of his career, lives in and for the present. He is a fatalist; faced by two alternatives, he chooses the pleasanter; he prefers counterfeit death to the heroic reality at the hands of Douglas. But he is no coward; when the sheriff and his men are waiting outside, he says, with a shrug:

> If you will deny the sheriff, so; if not, let him enter: if I become not a cart as well as another man, a plague on my bringing up! I hope I shall as soon be strangled with a halter as another,

and he goes to sleep.

His jests are, it must be admitted, sometimes unseasonable, his morals at all times bad. Yet it is not for these that he is rejected. He is rejected because he commits the tragic fault of "insolence." When he learns that Prince Henry has become king, he forgets to live for the moment; he begins to look ahead and he becomes ambitious.

The friendship between royalty and a private man calls for infinite tact, for the inferior must never cross his friend in his public life. Falstaff's disgrace may be bitter, but the critics who condemn the Prince because he forgets his old friends have not contemplated the alternative—Falstaff as Duke of Eastcheap, the King's favourite; Bardolph as Lord Keeper of the Privy Purse, with Doll Tearsheet dowager to the Ladies-in-Waiting.

The friendship between Falstaff and Prince Hal can only be an affair of the moment; when their positions change it must cease at once. If Falstaff does not realise this, the less Falstaff he; in the end he loses his sense of humour and his comedy turns to tragedy, for he sins against friendship by putting the new king in an intolerable position. With Pistol and old Justice Shallow,

he has spurred in from the country and arrives just as the King is coming from his coronation.

> FALSTAFF: God save thy grace, King Hal! my royal Hal!
>
> PISTOL: The heavens thee guard and keep, most royal imp of fame.
>
> FALSTAFF: God save thee, my sweet boy!

At the worst possible moment the sins of Henry's youth rise up and confront him in gross bodily form. Everyone is watching to see what he will do. He must choose in a moment between his past and his future, and, from what his intimates should have known of his character, he will not hesitate.

Nemesis follows Falstaff close on hubris. King Henry had no other alternative, for throughout English history is writ large this sentence—"A king must have no friends." But for all that, Henry is not a lovable person.

Something seems to have gone wrong with *Henry V.*, the third play of the trilogy, as if Shakespeare had tired of the theme or was impatient to try something else. He seems, too, for a moment to have lost his self-confidence, for he has to introduce a chorus to make a special appeal to his audience to use their imagination. *Henry V.* is a patriotic play, in rather a narrow, sentimental, and humourless way. Besides, there is no conflict in the story; it is quite clear that the French are too worthless even to give Henry a good fight; there is not enough opposition to bring out his finer qualities. The sub-plot also is weak; the incidents—the moving report of Falstaff's death or the beating of Pistol—are good enough in themselves but they lack coherence.

Shakespeare was under no illusions about his hero. He had already shown in the two parts of *Henry IV.*, in the speeches between the King and his son, that Henry IV. was, on his own confession, a scheming hypocrite and an unscrupulous liar, and he warns us that Henry V. will follow his dying father's advice:

Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days.
More would I, but my lungs are wasted so
That strength of speech is utterly denied me.
How I came by the crown, O God forgive:
And grant it may with thee in true peace live.

There is no glamour, then, about the motive for the French war. The clergy support it in the hope that it will distract attention from an awkward proposal to reduce their revenues; the nobility are spoiling for a fight; Pistol puts it most frankly:

Yoke-fellows in arms,
Let us to France; like horse-leeches, my boys,
To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck.

Shakespeare can be terribly cynical about the pomp and circumstance of kingship. It is true that he wrote the much-quoted lines:

There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.

But in their proper setting these words are the bitterest satire; for Claudius says them, the murderer of his king and brother, the strongest proof of their falsity.

Yet if there is little of the ideal hero about Henry V., he is certainly Shakespeare's most efficient King. He is brutal and callous; he knows his own mind, and he lets nothing stand in his way; he is a bad friend. But to rule in brutal times a king needs brutal qualities; he must have no emotions.

His Tragedies

Aristotle in his *Poetics* defined tragedy as the imitation of an action that "through pity and fear effects the proper purgation of these emotions." Purgation is a very deep emotional experience which must be felt to be understood. It is rare, and is experienced most often at the performance of a great drama. Drama is more likely to produce it than a tragedy in real life, because in life even the greatest suffering is intermittent, mercifully alloyed in the routine of existence; in drama it is concentrated. It is not necessarily confined to tragedy of death; it can be felt, for instance, to some degree in the last scenes of *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest.* Shakespeare, more often than any other dramatist, has the power of evoking purgation.

Purgation is experienced by the spectator, the result of the play and not part of its structure, as contortion or exhilaration are the results of poison or a stimulant. Yet in the making of a play certain qualities are most likely to produce this purgation. They may be summed up in Aristotle's word "magnitude." Few of the plays which are labelled tragedy reach this magnitude, which is a quality that cannot be defined, only perceived or missed. It is overpoweringly present in *The Œdipus Tyrannus, Lear, Othello,* and *Tess;* there is less of it in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Cæsar;* very little in *Romeo and Juliet.*

Magnitude of suffering needs a victim who is himself great, not necessarily in the sense of worldly greatness, but whose character and personality are fuller and finer than the average of humanity. Still, as the kings of the earth have a certain magnitude if only in their control over many subjects, tragedy is more likely to succeed when it treats of great men. The passing even of an ineffectual emperor will affect a nation, the burial of "some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood" will be unknown outside the country churchyard.

It is unlikely that Shakespeare had any theories of construction in writing his greatest tragedies. Great writers work intuitively and by inspiration rather than by rule, though no artist ever succeeded who was not so perfect a master of his technique that he could express his intentions without reference to the book of instructions.

Shakespeare's great tragic period followed the three Romantic Comedies. The difference in tone in the plays of this group—*Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear,* and *Timon*—the increasing sense of bitterness which begins with Hamlet's soliloquies, rises in *Lear* and reaches its height in *Timon,* is so striking that many critics have considered that the only explanation can be some tremendous upheaval in Shakespeare's private life, and, since a fierce disgust of sexuality runs through these plays, they have divined some passionate adventure. The explanation is unnecessary; a general feeling of revulsion that the world was rotten and love was loathsome is expressed again and again in these years in the writings of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Ben Jonson and Marston, for instance. It is not surprising if Shakespeare, keenly sensitive to every change of mood or feeling, should have been tainted with the general nausea. All the same, an artist can only give out what he has taken in; if Shakespeare had not met with Cressida in the flesh, he had certainly suffered the torments of Troilus in the spirit. Yet these tragedies are not all gloomy; the day is fair and foul by turns, and the fidelity of Cordelia redeems the brutality of Regan and Goneril. It is not the least of Shakespeare's greatness that, knowing all that is tragic in life, he does not fret himself with interminably asking why; nor, when no answer is given him, does he lose his temper with God or man. He has, in Mr. Bernard Shaw's phrase, "a grim delight in his own power of looking terrible facts in the face with a chuckle."

Julius Cæsar is the first play of the great tragic period and the first in which the new treatment of the story is

prominent, wherein events are used as the background of character. It is an excellent stage play, and though it has neither the height nor the depth of the greatest tragedies, the technique, especially the way in which the interest is maintained after Cæsar's murder, is admirable.

Brutus is the real hero, and he is given most chance of showing his character; yet Cæsar, though treated unsympathetically, remains dominant, and, even after his death, his spirit ranges abroad until his assassins have perished. Shakespeare's picture of the great Dictator has been much criticised as unjust and inaccurate; Cæsar's weaknesses are more apparent than his strength; his physical powers are waning; he has developed an air of conscious superiority and contempt for those who differ from him; and he seems in his words and behaviour to be little more than a haughty and somewhat superstitious tyrant. But however much we may idealise Julius Cæsar, it is not improbable that by 44 B.C. he had ceased to suffer fools with any patience; moreover, whether this treatment is historically true or not, it is dramatically essential. There is little enough justification for the murder as it is, and unless Cæsar had been shown as an unamiable character, there could have been no case for the conspirators. At the same time, Shakespeare seems to have been more interested in the motives of the conspirators than in Cæsar's fate; the real conflict is between Brutus, Cassius, and Antony.

Cassius is responsible for the conspiracy. Politically he belongs to a type fairly common in Roman history, the fanatic with one conscious idea: Cæsar is a tyrant, and therefore he must be destroyed. But this simple political creed is mixed with baser motives. Vulgar jealousy is a commoner irritant in politics than historians will always admit, and not a little of Cassius' high sounding talk with Brutus springs from the personal resentment that this man

> Is now become a god, and Cassius is
> A wretched creature and must bend his body
> If Cæsar barelessly but nod on him.

But there is no denying his capacity or his knowledge of the human character; it is seen in the way he gathers his fellow-conspirators. Brutus he wins over with an appeal to his family honour, Casca, terrified in the storm, by a subtle flattery of his courage. He is the one practical man, and the conspiracy fails because Brutus consistently refuses to take his advice.

Brutus, on the other hand, is one of those genuinely high-souled men who have been responsible for so many of the calamities of the world; he has the highest ideals for Humanity and complete ignorance of men. Being conscious of his own rectitude, he feels that whatever he does must be right; and, like most idealists who try to carry too lofty enthusiasms into practice, he is obstinate even to pig-headedness, and capable of easy self-deception. His reasoning, for instance, that Cæsar should die lest, being crowned, he might become ambitious, would not have deceived a less spiritually minded mortal. He suffers, too, from the misfortune of having an illustrious ancestor in Lucius Junius Brutus, who drove the last King from Rome.

Once he has joined the conspiracy he becomes a man with a mission, and he worked himself almost into religious fervour as he exclaims:

> And, gentle friends,
> Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully;
> Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
> Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds:
> And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,
> Stir up their servants to an act of rage,
> And after seem to chide 'em.

He forgets that blood will have blood, and that a revolution, however pure its motives, lets loose every sordid passion. His complete ignorance of men is best shown in his contempt for Antony,

> for he is given
> To sports, to wildness, and much company.

The plot succeeds, Cæsar is murdered, and at once the tide turns. Antony enters and begs the privilege of speaking the funeral oration. Cassius, knowing Antony's character, protests, but Brutus overrules him, and from that moment the cause of "Liberty, Freedom, and Enfranchisement" is lost.

The contrast between Brutus and Antony is brought out most clearly by their speeches in the great Forum scene. Brutus is coldly logical; "as he was ambitious, I slew him"; no more need be said. Antony, beginning with a hostile audience, brings them round to his side and then inspires them with blind rage against the conspirators by every kind of emotional appeal. He has none of Brutus' nobility, and his highest motive is to revenge his dead chief; but he knows how to move the hearts of men. He is not a noble character, and, though he stirs our hearts to admiration by his eloquence, Shakespeare is careful to show him next with Lepidus and Octavius, his fellow triumvirs, pricking off the names of his private enemies on the proscription list. And yet when the conspiracy has ended in miserable failure, and Brutus is lying dead before his pursuers, his epitaph is:

> This was the noblest Roman of them all:
> All the conspirators save only he
> Did what they did in envy of great Cæsar;
> He only, in a general honest thought
> And common good to all, made one of them.
> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, "This was a man."

It is not the least of Brutus' tragedy that these words should have been said by Antony.

It is clear from what little is seen of young Octavius in *Julius Cæsar* that his alliance with Antony is not likely to last very long; *Antony and Cleopatra,* written some five years later, shows the sequel. The triumvirs have separated, and Antony is in Egypt where he has

fallen under the spell of Cleopatra. His degradation is rapid; from time to time he shows some signs of the old Antony, but before the end he loses his manhood and even his common sense; he cannot kill himself without bungling, but he dies where he should, in Cleopatra's arms.

The story of these two who sacrificed the Empire of the East to love is one of the world's favourites; many writers have retold it, trying to recreate this woman who could so sway " the triple pillar of the world." If Cleopatra is judged solely by her actions in the play, she appears as little better than a splendid harlot, as Antony in his wrath cries out:

> You have been a boggler ever:
> But when we in our viciousness grow hard—
> O misery on't!—the wise gods seel our eyes;
> In our filth drop our clear judgments: make us
> Adore our errors; laugh at 's, while we strut
> To our confusion. . .
> I found you as a morsel cold upon
> Dead Cæsar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
> Of Cneius Pompey's; besides what hotter hours,
> Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
> Luxuriously pick'd out: for, I am sure,
> Though you can guess what temperance should be,
> You know not what it is.

But Shakespeare has thrown a glamour over her which overspreads moral judgments.

Again and again when he has soared in some fine passage, Shakespeare will stand aside and laugh at himself in some merciless parody of his finest speeches. In *Antony and Cleopatra* he created Enobarbus, the blunt soldier, who has no illusions, and whose coarse frankness is a pungent comment on Antony's easy optimism. It was not to be expected that Cleopatra would make much impression on him. Yet, when he was asked to describe her first meeting with Antony, he is inspired almost with ecstasy, as he ends:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
Become themselves in her; that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

The artistry of putting this speech in Enobarbus' mouth is superb.

As a stage play, *Antony and Cleopatra* is overweighted with history, with the result that the action darts from place to place all over the world; nor is it of the same magnitude as the greatest tragedies, for neither Antony nor Cleopatra is capable of such depth of suffering as Lear or Othello. But nowhere has the magic of words been surpassed in such phrases as:

O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
And I am all forgotten,

or,

Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done,
And we must sleep,

with its echo in Iras' words:

Finish, good lady; the bright day is done
And we are for the dark.

And at the end,

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparallel'd. Downy windows, close;
And golden Phœbus never be beheld
Of eyes again so royal. Your crown's awry;
I'll mend it, and then play.

Coriolanus, the third of the Roman plays, has never been a favourite, except with schoolmasters. Yet it is admirably constructed and the unity of tone is preserved throughout, without digression or clowning. But Shakespeare seems to have had no love for his characters; this is unusual, for even Edmund and Iago, his greatest

studies of evil, have plenty of qualities which appeal, if not to our affection, at least to our admiration. Coriolanus himself is just a Tory without a sense of humour, and the play is a full length, rather remorseless, study of his character. Like Othello, he is a professional soldier; but Othello is a general, Coriolanus simply a gladiator. Othello is more modest, and his modesty is the cause of his ruin; Coriolanus is destroyed by his own pride and his ungovernable temper. He judges everyone by his crude military value; if the Roman citizens cannot fight, let them starve. He has all the assurance of the ignorant man who can get his own way because he uses force; in war he is invaluable, in peace a canker of the commonwealth. His good qualities are as simple; he has a primitive, bull-like courage, a virtue as rare as it is dangerous, and an intense tenderness for his wife, as surprising as it is deep; for Virgilia has all the womanly weaknesses so conspicuously wanting in Volumnia. She cares nothing for Coriolanus' oaken crowns so long as he comes home safe.

Coriolanus' wife brings out his best qualities; his mother, Volumnia, has produced his worst, as she proudly boasts to Virgilia:

> When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, when for a day of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding, I, considering how honour would become such a person, that it was no better than picture-like to hang by the wall, if renown made it not stir, was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

Volumnia, in short, is the old Roman mother: Shakespeare seems not to have admired the type.

But if Volumnia has made Coriolanus, she has, in the end, the bitterness of destroying him. When he returns with the Volscians to burn Rome, she goes out to plead with him, and in her final appeal for Rome she defeats him by her stronger will; she saves the City at the cost of her son's life.

With *Julius Cæsar, Coriolanus* is one of the few political plays, and a good deal of loose criticism has been expended over the supposed "anti-democratic" feeling shown in the crowd scenes. Two charges are made against the crowd; they are fickle, and they smell unpleasantly. The second fact was indeed obvious to any Londoner; fashionable young men used to carry pouncet boxes to distract their nostrils in the crowded streets. But Shakespeare disliked the smell of the courtier almost as much; the most offensive remark Don Pedro can say to Benedick to prove him in love is that "a' rubs himself with civet."

The first accusation is more serious. The crowd at the beginning of *Coriolanus,* being hungry and starving, suspect the patricians. From what is seen of the patricians, they are probably right; but all crowds, and even quite intelligent persons, when times are bad, prefer to lay the blame for economic distress on the obviously prosperous. They have no reason to love Coriolanus; one of his first remarks to them is:

> Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
> And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
> With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
> As I could pick my lance.

Even so, after his achievements at Corioli, they are willing in a moment of quixotic generosity to forget the past in the hope that he will prove their friend in the future. Immediately after the election the tribunes come upon them and precipitate the natural reaction of feeling. Common sense returns, and the citizens agree that they have made a mistake; Coriolanus has not deserved their loves.

The tribunes, from the patricians' point of view, are villainous demagogues; yet they are right from their own. They are in the difficult position of all popular leaders, who have to decide whether to secure the immediate advantage of their own people, or endure intolerable conditions for the sake of the larger unit, the state. At all times Coriolanus is the enemy of the people, and when he is driven out, the city benefits. As Sicinius, unconscious of the bad news which is upon him, says:

> We hear not of him, neither need we fear him;
> His remedies are tame i' the present peace
> And quietness of the people, which before
> Were in wild hurry. Here do we make his friends
> Blush that the world goes well, who rather had,
> Though they themselves did suffer by 't, behold
> Dissentious numbers pestering streets than see
> Our tradesmen singing in their shops and going
> About their functions friendly.

But the tribunes in solving one problem have created a greater, for Coriolanus was the only man who could keep Aufidius in check. Now both are at the gates of Rome.

The crowd are certainly fickle, and their feelings are an indication of the success of a leader; being humanity in the mass, they respect success. Even educated democracies in the twentieth century have been known to change sides.

The crowd in *Julius Cæsar* shows the same variability; but so, for that matter, does the sensitive reader as he turns from Brutus' appeal to Antony's.

In general, Shakespeare keeps his plebeians and his patricians apart in separate scenes in a play; in these crowd scenes he brings them together at a crisis. He was not anti-democratic, nor did he dislike the "people"; no one has portrayed them with more sympathy in Dogberry and the watch, in Bottom, in Stephano, even in Pompey the pandar. The difference is that Bottom has

a name in Quince's workshop; he becomes "*2nd Cit.*" in a political meeting.

Hamlet is the second of the group of great tragedies, the most discussed of all plays. The question whether Hamlet was mad, in a medical sense, so furiously debated forty years ago, has rather ceased to interest the present generation, but the further question—why did he delay to kill his uncle—has not yet been answered to the general satisfaction. The problem seems not to have caused much excitement for two hundred years, but since the days of Goethe, critics and psychologists have invoked all the laws of complex and suppression to explain a phenomenon which was perfectly familiar to any Elizabethan playgoer. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—it seems almost profane to say it—belongs to a common and popular type of drama known as the Revenge Play, wherein the dramatic motive is not whether the venger will achieve his object, but how and when. The interest of a Revenge Play was in watching the hero surmounting obstacle after obstacle until finally he reached his victim's heart; but while lesser dramatists laid physical obstacles in the way of revenge, Shakespeare puts intellectual.

It has been rather the fashion to picture Hamlet as a kind of neurotic undergraduate who suffers from sudden spasms of action. Yet none of the other persons in the play take this view. To Ophelia, he is

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
> The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> The observed of all observers.

Claudius dare not touch him because the people love him, and Fortinbras, not a man to be impressed by the drawing-room virtues, sums up his qualities at the end:

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
> For he was likely, had he been put on,

To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.

Nor do his deeds suggest the man who is too thoughtful to act. His obvious and insolent contempt for the King, his impetuosity when he first sees the ghost, his slaying of Polonius, his speed in devising the trap for Claudius, his ruthlessness in disposing of Rosencrans and Guildernstern, and his grim amusement at the surprise that awaits them, his behaviour at the funeral of Ophelia, his ferocity when he kills Claudius, stabbing him first and then forcing the poisoned cup between his lips—these are not the traits of a man who has strayed away from the University. Hamlet, indeed, is the most headlong and fiery of all Shakespeare's heroes, in thought, in word, and in act; and yet he delays, and is for ever cursing himself for his delay.

When Hamlet is first left to himself he reveals his feelings in the soliloquy, beginning, "O that this too, too solid flesh would melt." He is nauseated by his mother's rapid remarriage; it betokens something vile in her nature, for Claudius, her new husband, is not even physically attractive. There is, too, a miasma of suspicion and rottenness pervading the Danish court, and Hamlet, being above all things impetuous, cannot endure this atmosphere of doubt and suppression. He ends this speech with the words, "Break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue"; for indeed he knows neither what to say nor what to do.

Then comes the Ghost's revelation. But the word of a Ghost is scarcely evidence to justify the immediate slaying of Claudius; besides, Hamlet shares the popular belief that sometimes the devil sends the phantasms of the dead to lure the living on to their damnation. The Ghost's visitation increases Hamlet's gloom; indefinite suspicion has been changed into an unproved certainty. Hamlet now knows what to look for, and the knowledge is worse than the ignorance. Thereafter, like other

heroes of tragedy, he feigns madness in order that he may have better opportunity to spy on his uncle.

The arrival of the players at last gives Hamlet the chance of proving or disproving, beyond all doubt, whether Claudius is guilty. The plan succeeds; Claudius betrays himself before his whole court, and rushes away in horror to his own apartments. Hamlet is convinced of his uncle's guilt and is now eager for his revenge; but the whole situation has altered. Hitherto Claudius has been the pursued; with the realisation that Hamlet knows his guilt, the initiative passes into his hands and he turns on his pursuer; and Hamlet, though he has learnt the truth, has lost the opportunity for revenge. Once only is he again alone with his uncle; as he passes on his way to his mother's room, he sees Claudius at prayer. He draws his sword and approaches stealthily, but, as he raises his arm to strike, the Ghost's most bitter complaint comes back to him:

> Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
> Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
> No reckoning made, but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head:
> Oh, horrible! Oh, horrible! most horrible!

This is no moment for revenge; it would be a deed of charity to take Claudius

> in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and season'd for his passage.

When he is alone with his mother, the emotions which have been gathering head for so long, break out in a torrent of vile and bitter abuse, which is interrupted but for a few moments by Polonius' unlucky cry. The death of Polonius is ultimately the cause of Hamlet's undoing. It gives the King the necessary excuse for anything he may devise against his nephew; and, too, it makes Hamlet the victim of another venger—Laertes. When Hamlet returns, Claudius and Laertes are ready for him; he is decoyed into the fencing match with the poisoned

foil and dies as Laertes' victim, but not before he has slain his uncle.

Such, in outline, is the rise and fall of the plot in *Hamlet;* a good story, consummately told. But Shakespeare's interest in the play was rather in the workings of Hamlet's mind; and the importance of his actions lies in the stimulus they give him to utter his thoughts. He is shown in contrast with all kinds of people, with the King, whom he hates; with Polonius, whom he despises; with his friend Horatio; with his schoolfellows, whom he suspects; with Ophelia, who is too weak for him; with the players, so that he may give forth his views (and Shakespeare's) on the player's art; with the gravedigger, to talk of the queer tricks of mortality; besides this he is given long soliloquies in which to unpack his heart of his own particular griefs and his thoughts on the problems of the world in general. It would be wrong, perhaps, to call this Shakespeare's greatest play; it is certainly his most interesting.

Macbeth, as a whole, is the least satisfactory of the great tragedies. There are passages—such as the Bloody Sergeant's speech (I., ii.) or the talk of Ross and the Old Man (II., ii.)—which can scarcely have been written by Shakespeare at this or any time, and there are distinct traces of an earlier play, especially in the last act, all suggesting that in converting an old melodramatic Chronicle Play into a tragedy, Shakespeare was too pressed for time to do more than concentrate on the main theme. Apart from these blemishes, the great scenes in the play are the tautest passages of tragic horror that Shakespeare ever wrote.

Macbeth is a tragedy of Fate. In all the tragedies the idea of a "divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" is present; it may be simply the comet that foretells the death of princes; it may be the darker feeling that

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
> They kill us for their sport.

But until the irrecoverable end, even in *Lear,* some way of escape seems possible. Macbeth is throughout the plaything of some evil power that uses the witches as his ministers.

When Macbeth first enters with Banquo, he has been brooding on treason, and the prophecy that he shall be Thane of Glamis and King hereafter comes pat on his thoughts. The first prophecy is fulfilled at once; how will the second be fulfilled? Macbeth sees:

> Why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And makes my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature?

But Macbeth is not the man for such a deed of treachery; his nature, as his wife knows, is "too full o' the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way." The ambition of any other man, wedded to Lady Macbeth's cruelty, might have achieved the prize, but she forgets Macbeth's imagination. Macbeth is so swayed by his Imagination that he is the shadow, his Imagination the reality. Had he not tried to thwart it, all might have been well; even when the time for the murder has come, it shows him the meaning and the horror of the deed, and he would have listened, but for his wife, who uses the one argument irresistible to a soldier:

> Art thou *afeard*
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire?

When he descends from Duncan's chamber, aimlessly carrying the bloody daggers, the realisation of what has been done completely overcomes him, and he walks as if in a trance. The contrast here, between Lady Macbeth, firm, remorseless, and practical, and Macbeth, living in the world of fantasy, tortured by the voice that cries, "Sleep no more, Macbeth hath murdered sleep," is incomparable. She seems so strong, concerned only

with facts and things; she has no fancies, she dare not. And later when the loud knocking suddenly breaks upon this sublimation of horror, Macbeth is too dazed to move until she takes him roughly by the arm with the impatient cry:

> A little water clears us of this deed;
> How easy is it then.

Three ideas stand out in this scene: blood, water, darkness. They recur at the end of the play when Lady Macbeth's strength has failed and she can no longer deny her imagination—"Hell is murky" . . . "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him" . . . "What! will these hands ne'er be clean" . . . "Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

Fate having tempted Macbeth to the murder, the prophecy is fulfilled, and Macbeth's Imagination, like some genie, towers over him, tormenting him unceasingly. The prophecy that he should be King was true; so too was that other which hailed Banquo as the father to a line of kings, and as he realises this, Macbeth begins to envy Duncan, at rest in his grave.

Having begun with murder, Macbeth cannot stop, and his degeneration is swift and terrible; he becomes filled with blood lust, and, in his madness, he even challenges Fate itself into the lists to fight to the finish. Banquo is murdered, and, inevitably, Fleance escapes. Natural allies desert Macbeth, and now he has only the witches to support him; they have cheated him once; they cheat him again with three more prophecies that lie like truth. As the avengers gather, the full horror of the tragedy of Macbeth is summed up in the sleep-walking scene, through the lips of the once hard, pitiless woman who had forced him to destroy himself. One by one the prophecies fail, and Macbeth dies fighting. Macbeth, like Faustus in the old story, called up the Spirit of

Darkness; it gave him his desire and then dashed him into pieces.

In *Hamlet* Shakespeare had used the soliloquy to show the workings of a rich and various mind; in *Macbeth* he uses it to show a soul in torment.

Othello is Shakespeare's greatest piece of dramatic construction, so closely concentrated that not a line can be cut without in some measure spoiling the unity of the play. There is no secondary plot to divide the interest, and no unnecessary detail.

Othello is not a problem play, but it has raised a problem; what was Iago's motive? Hazlitt answers:

> The character of Iago is one of the supererogations of Shakespear's genius. Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought this whole character unnatural, because his villainy is *without a sufficient motive*. Shakespear, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, is natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt or kill flies for sport. Iago in fact belongs to the class of character, common to Shakespear and at the same time peculiar to him; whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts are hard and callous. Iago is to be sure an extreme instance of the kind; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions.

This is well said; the evil is already present in Iago's character, but it needs some spark to kindle his wrath against Othello. This motive is shown in Iago's opening speech to Roderigo:

Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capp'd to him: and, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worse no less a place:
But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them, with a bombast circumstance
Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war:
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, "Certes," says he,
"I have already chose my officer."
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife;
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoric,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle, without practice,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election:
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds
Christian and heathen, must be be-lee'd and calm'd
By debitor and creditor: this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship's ancient.

Iago is suffering from the bitterest of human misfortunes—a wounded vanity; he has seen a man whom he despised promoted over his head to a position that he coveted, and it engenders within him a mad anger against Cassio and Othello. He shies away from the unpalatable truth that Othello has chosen the better man; he snaps at any excuse for his anger, and jealousy immediately suggests a motive which in his heart he knows to be false; Othello has been false with his wife, and Cassio, too; he must have revenge.

In this play Shakespeare has given three types of

soldier still quite familiar in many a regimental mess. Iago is the ranker, with all the consuming vanity of the self-made man. Othello, his victim, is the professional soldier who lives entirely for his profession.

Othello has spent all his life in war, and he knows nothing of cities or the ways of politicians and their wives. Having ordered himself in obedience to a plain ideal of duty and efficiency, his moral outlook is simple. For he has never been faced with problems of conduct; he has received his orders, and has been chiefly concerned with the best and quickest ways of carrying them out. Doubt and uncertainty are alien to the soldierly mind; "to be once in doubt," he says, "is once to be resolved," and, as soon as he has cleared up any situation, he acts quickly without any further question. These qualities are admirable in the field; but Othello by his marriage with a society lady of Venice finds himself involved in new kinds of problems in which his training and experience count for nothing. His love for Desdemona is not youthful passion but a mutual understanding:

> She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,
> And I loved her that she did pity me,

and this increases the horror of Iago's suggestions.

The third type of soldier is Cassio, the regular, the society soldier; a man who is efficient enough on service but has other interests than his profession, and the weaknesses of the Elizabethan soldier for wine and women; but hitherto Cassio's failings have not interfered with his soldiership.

Iago having begun with a wild desire to hurt, finds little difficulty in making Cassio drunk on guard, thereby bringing down Othello's cold anger on an inefficient soldier. Cassio is dismissed and Iago promoted to his place. This easy success excites Iago, who becomes fascinated by his own plot; Cassio and Othello had thought him a third-rate man; he will show them that he is the very master of their fate. He will use Cassio

to destroy Othello through Desdemona; and so, drop by drop, he poisons Othello's mind, never leaving him for a moment to examine the truth for himself, but hinting, insinuating, denying until Othello is too fevered with passion to think coolly. Othello is not moved merely by vulgar jealousy, the cuckoldry motive so tediously common in Elizabethan plays, but a fiercer and nobler anger that Desdemona, so he thinks, has sinned against his ideal, and to kill her is a matter of duty. In any other conflict Othello would use his own judgment before taking action; here he is powerless and blind; who was he to know anything of the ways of a lady of Venice, noted throughout the world for the cunning and the magnificence of its harlots? Nor has he any reason to distrust Iago, for he is quite unconscious that he has given offence by his choice of a lieutenant. "Why did I marry?" he cries:

> This honest creature doubtless
> Knows more, much more, than he unfolds.

Desdemona's simplicity, almost folly, helps on the tragedy. Emilia, who is a woman of the world, suspects that Othello is jealous, but Desdemona refuses to believe it, and she does everything wrong; she advances when she should retire, and shrinks when she should be bold. She is too loyal, and not until the very end does she understand the reason for Othello's change.

Her death is the more moving, in that Othello kills without anger. As he sees it, it is his duty, and he is accustomed to carry out his duties without questioning his heart.

At first sight, Iago has triumphed; he has shown his power, as he wished, and vindicated himself. But yet evil does not prevail in the end. Othello's ideal was true, but he was unequal to it.

Lear is by many considered Shakespeare's greatest achievement, and there is a general feeling that the play is too great to be acted. Lamb expressed this very forcibly in his essay on *The Tragedies of Shakespeare*—

> To see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear; they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches.

The reason for this feeling lies in the magnitude of the play, which is in every way greater than humanity. The storm seems almost the result of Lear's passions, the characters move—like Norse gods—gigantic across some greater world, the times are remote, the places vague.

Shakespeare's *Lear,* until recent years, was seldom acted on the stage. Lamb, indeed, never saw it; for two hundred years after the restoration the version of Nahum Tate—a miserable melodramatic affair with a happy ending—was used on the English stage. This neglect of *Lear* is not due to any defect in the play, but to the Englishman's abhorrence of showing his emotions in public; no one can sit through a performance of *Lear* outwardly unmoved.

In *Lear* one word—"nothing"—lets loose all Hell; and Cordelia says it. When the play opens, Lear has already decided on the division of his kingdom; the map has been drawn, and there only remains a ceremonious declaration before he resigns his crown. It is the last time that the old King is ever to appear in his full

majesty, and he expects his vanity to be humoured to the fullest. Goneril and Regan easily fall in with his mood, but Cordelia, bitterly resentful of this order to "heave her heart into her mouth," suffers from a kind of paralysis of the will; whatever she meant to say, the only word her tongue can utter is "nothing." To Lear it is the worst public affront he has ever suffered, and coming so unexpectedly from his best loved daughter, it arouses the spirit of wrath from within. His plans are upset; his one faithful follower—Kent—is cast out for daring to oppose him, and Lear is alone.

Lear dominates the first scene, and naturally, for he is King; but directly he has resigned his crown he ceases to be master and becomes one of Goneril's subjects. This he refuses to see, and in Goneril's house he acts in complete disregard of her wishes. When she protests at the licence of his followers, her words are sneering and unkind, but not unreasonable; there is no justification for Lear's terrible curse. Sending Kent before him, he rushes away to find Regan, his other daughter. As he reaches Gloucester's castle, whither Regan and her husband Cornwall have removed, the first person he sees is Kent, locked in the stocks. He forgets that Kent is simply the servant of a private man, and no longer his chief herald. When Regan treats him more coldly even than Goneril, and later when Goneril herself arrives, he is left with no choice but submission. This is too much; in his rage he dashes out into the storm, followed by Kent and his fool.

Shakespeare has many kinds of fool, nearly all delightful. The commonest is the clown; a stock character brought in to raise a laugh. Shakespeare kept the low comedian in bounds, when he could, by giving him a good part, such as Gobbo, Dogberry, the gravedigger, or Bottom. These are literally clowns, ill-educated men who belong to the masses, and score their hits by the contrast of their natural wit or folly with the manners of the gentlefolk.

The second group are the professional fools, such as

Touchstone or Feste, motley-minded gentlemen, privileged to be their masters' corrupters of words.

Lear's fool is a "natural," a half-wit, with the divine simplicity of the half sane. His devotion to Lear is almost doglike; and yet, quite unintentionally, he is his master's evil genius, for, lacking the courtier's tact, he utters his own thoughts without any reserve. He is truth itself, the thorn in Lear's conscience, the perpetual *memento* of his folly.

The storm, consorting with Lear's rage, rouses him still further until his passions grow beyond control; and then suddenly the storm dies down for a moment into silence as Lear cries out:

> I am a man
> More sinned against than sinning,

and for the first time we realise that he is. From this point a great change comes over Lear; his old tyrannical pride has been burnt out of him, and in its place is born a new feeling of sympathy and humility; he begins to forget his own sorrows in the sufferings of others:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just.

The sudden appearance of poor Tom, the bedlam, is more than Lear can bear; he has felt the approach of madness, and his last outburst has left him with perilously little restraint; now with the sight of the madman, filthy, unkempt, almost naked, his mind gives way.

When he recovers his sanity, he is in Cordelia's care. It is the first time that they have met since Lear cast her out; as he wakes he looks at her and murmurs:

You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

CORDELIA: Sir, do you know me?

LEAR: You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?

CORDELIA: Still, still, far wide!

DOCTOR: He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile.

LEAR: Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity,
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands; let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
Of my condition—

and he tries to kneel before Cordelia. The purging of Lear, begun in the storm, interrupted by his madness, is now complete. From being a violent and tyrannical monster, he has become a beautiful character.

In the battle which follows, Lear and Cordelia are captured; but it makes no difference to him. Prison will only keep him nearer to Cordelia:

Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon 's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.

There it might have been left; but Shakespeare spares us nothing. Lear enters once more—with Cordelia dead in

his arms, hanged by order of Edmund the bastard. In a lesser drama we might take refuge in the thought that this is but a fiction, these things never happened. There is no such escape in *Lear*. And yet the tragedy is justified, for no one can leave *Lear* without feeling a purification, a cleansing in the soul.

There have been many attempts to discover Shakespeare's religious creed or philosophy, but all have failed for in the infinite variety of his plays one passage will contradict another. But if he had neither creed nor ideal theory of life, he had something more valuable—a sure instinct.

His thoughts are not peculiarly original; few indeed even of his greatest lines cannot be paralleled, as scholars have shown, in the writings of his predecessors, but he had the alchemist's power of converting other men's copper into the finest gold.

Two qualities were his especially: a zest insatiable for every kind of experience, even exceeding Solomon's, which makes for "wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore"; and a power over words which is inscrutable.

He is the poetical character, which as Keats wrote—and Keats was here thinking of Shakespeare—

> has no self. It is everything and nothing. It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body. The Sun,—the Moon,—the Sea,

> and men and women, who are the creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet has none—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures.

Shakespeare's plays have, too, a mysterious quality of perennial freshness. One may read them again and again and at each reading something fresh appears, a character will assume a new significance, a phrase will suddenly take on a more vivid meaning. The final criticism of Shakespeare will never be written.

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